



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PRESS RELEASE

USAID PROMOTES REGIONAL TRADE IN CENTRAL ASIA

ASTANA, Kazakhstan - Yesterday, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced that the U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID) will provide \$400,000 in additional funding for a comprehensive program intended to encourage greater trade and investment in Central Asia. The purpose of this initiative is to help Central Asian countries harmonize and streamline their customs operations based on international standards and best practices. It will advance ongoing USAID activities in the region and complement similar work in Afghanistan.

The first step will be to identify existing impediments to regional trade in Central Asia related to customs and border procedures. USAID will work with other donors, including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, to identify priority areas of assistance not fully addressed by existing or planned customs improvement projects.

After the initial assessment is completed, the Government of Kazakhstan and the United States will convene a high-level meeting under the auspices of the U.S.-Central Asian Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA). This will bring together senior officials representing the TIFA partners and Afghanistan, international donors and the private sector, to review the results and develop an action plan.

The goal is to reduce cross-border transaction costs for business and promote a more transparent and predictable commercial environment by streamlining customs procedures in Central Asia and encouraging greater coordination among the donors, the governments and the private sector. USAID will coordinate closely with the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, the U.S. Trade Development Agency, the Departments of State and Commerce, as well as with international donors and private sector firms in this effort.

Under its existing Trade Facilitation and Investment (TFI) project, USAID/Central Asia Republics provides assistance to Governments and businesses in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to help modernize the legal and regulatory framework for trade administration. To open and strengthen the dialogue between Customs and the private sector, the project has supported the establishment of Consultative Councils. The project also supports the facilitation of transit trade through the identification of constraints, analysis of the cost of transiting goods across the main routes of Central Asia, and encouragement of the use of systems to reduce transit costs.

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